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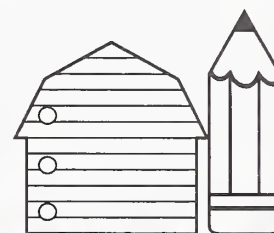
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# Ag in the Classroom

# Notes

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



A bi-monthly newsletter for the Agriculture in the Classroom Program. Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to help students understand the important role of agriculture in the United States economy. For information, contact the AITC National Program Leader, Room 3920, South Bldg., USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250-0991. 202/720-7925.

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## Consortium Establishes Network of AITC Programs

The Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) Consortium, a network of state AITC programs, was formally established at a meeting in Nashua, New Hampshire, following the National Conference in July. The organization, made up of representatives from state AITC programs, will provide national leadership in promoting agricultural literacy programs throughout the country.

Mark Linder, executive director of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, was elected as the first president of the Consortium. Diane Olson from the Missouri Farm Bureau is president-elect. Other members of the Consortium's executive committee include Anne Fitzgerald, Delaware; Andy Fagan, New York; Donna Reynolds (Secretary), Georgia; Doty Wenzel, Florida; Al Withers (Treasurer), Minnesota; Ellen Hellerich, Nebraska; Debra Spielmaker, Utah; and Ben Damonte, Nevada.

The original discussions about creating a national organization of AITC programs were held during the 1996 National Conference in California, Linder says. Over the next year, representatives from each of the four regions met to develop a mission statement, constitution, and bylaws for the organization. These were approved by voting delegates in July.

The Consortium's primary mission is to promote agricultural literacy programs, to provide leadership and a professional network for state Agriculture in the Classroom programs, and to work in cooperation with other national agricultural leadership and literacy programs to achieve

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## Using the Internet Links Utah's AITC with Teachers

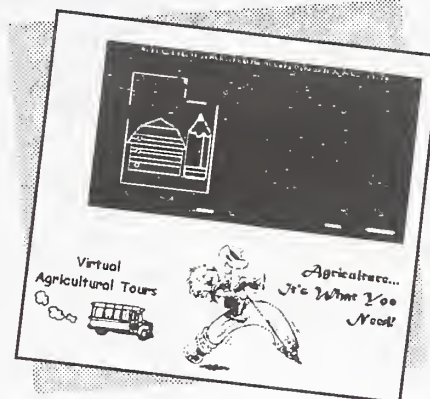
"Agriculture: Your Link to Life" is the new slogan for the Utah Ag in the Classroom program. It reflects not only the high-tech nature of today's agriculture, but also the program's use of the Internet to stay in touch with teachers in all corners of the state.

"We're a small program in a large state," says Debra Spielmaker, state contact for Utah's AITC program. The program is headquartered at Utah State University, located 30 miles south of the Idaho border. Most of the state's citizens live in the Wasatch Front, about 90 miles away. "With only one staff member, we need to use technology to reach out to teachers throughout this very large state."

Fortunately, most of the state's educators have access to the World Wide Web. Utah is the home to many high-tech firms, and the state's governor has made a commitment to have every school on line. While that goal has not been achieved yet, more than 90 percent of the state's teachers can use the Internet in their classrooms.

"Besides providing the wiring to make sure schools have access to the Internet, our state has also emphasized teacher inservice so teachers learn how to use the resources available online," Spielmaker says. "Utah's teachers are very savvy users of technology."

The Utah AITC web site (<http://ext.usu.edu/aitc>) meets the needs of this sophisticated audience.



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# I N T E R N E T

As more and more schools gain access to the Internet, teachers and students are discovering ways to learn about agriculture online. This special section of *Notes* is designed to identify some of the newest, best, and most interesting web sites.

## Web Site Offers Links to Many Ag-Related Sites

The Internet can be a wonderful way to learn about agriculture. But it can be difficult to find all the web sites that include agricultural information.

One excellent resource is Ag-Links, a web site that includes links to many ag-related home pages. From the Chicago Board of Trade to the Texas Beef Council and from the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program to the American Crop Protection Association, this web site is a great place to start learning more about agriculture.

The links are organized into seven categories: general agriculture; farms, ranches and companies; associations; markets; magazines and newsletters; government; and research and education. Many state Ag in the Classroom home pages can be accessed through this web site.

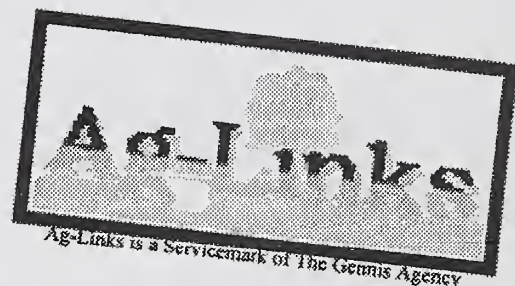
Find Ag Links at <http://www.gennis.com/aglinks.html>

## Take a "Virtual Tour"

As school budgets become more and more limited, field trips are often the first things to be eliminated. But teachers and students with access to the Internet can take "virtual tours" of many agriculture-related facilities.

For example, the Utah AITC web site offers a tour of the Utah State University research greenhouse. Full color photographs show everything from young wheat and soybean plants on hydroponic flats to the phytoremediation lab to the lab's automatic nutrient delivery system. There's even a picture of the lab's kitchen with the caption "You can just smell the coffee!"

Take the tour at <http://ext.usu.edu/aitc> by clicking on "tours".



## USDA Scientists Offer Lab Experiments for High School Biology

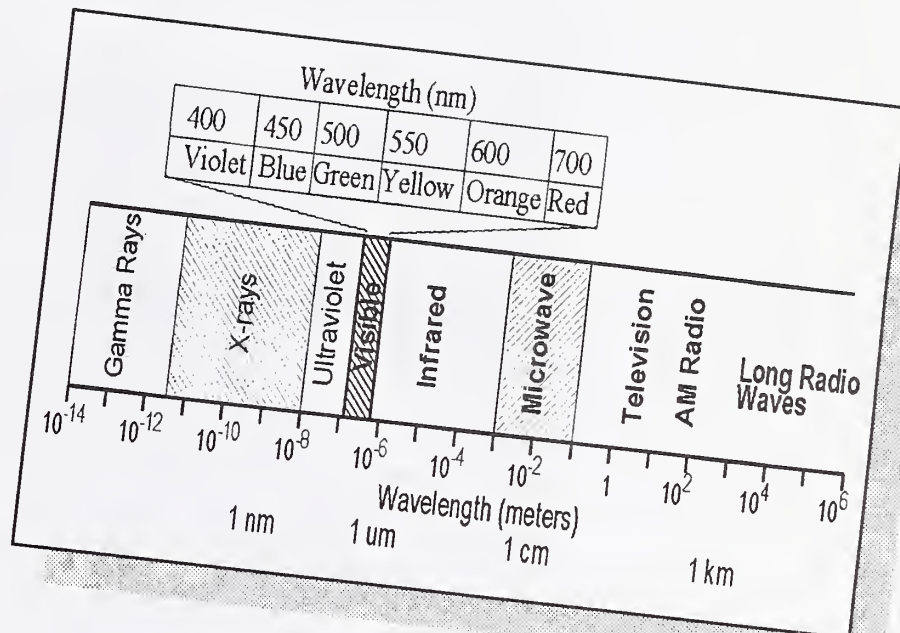
What if USDA research scientists could visit high school biology classrooms to help teachers and students develop experiments? Thanks to the Internet, they can. A site maintained by USDA's Agricultural Research Service offers a series of experiments that will help young scientists learn more about seed germination, relative humidity, and radiant energy.

Each experiment includes information on the grade level for which it is appropriate, subject areas, teaching objectives, materials needed, and the time involved in conducting the experiment. Background information, step-by-step instructions on conducting the experiment, and research references are also included.

Experiments include

- LED Radiometers
- Relative Humidity: An Important Environmental Measurement
- Effect of Cold Storage on Seeds
- Effect of Light on Seed Germination
- Seed Germination Tests
- Chi-Square: The Basic Statistical Method Used in Inheritance Studies
- Mariotte Siphon.

The site is located at <http://www.uswcl.ars.ag.gov/exper/exper.htm>.



## ARS Site Offers Fun and Amazing Facts About Honey Bees

Did you know that honey bees fly at 15 miles per hour? Did you know that the term "honey moon" originated with the Norse practice of consuming large quantities of mead (a honey wine) during the first month of marriage?

You would if you visited GEARS, a web site that includes information about honey bees. Developed and maintained by the Agricultural Research Service, GEARS includes information on a wide variety of bee-related topics. There's even a virtual tour that helps visitors discover the unseen floral world of the honey bee – through their eyes.

Visit the site at <http://gears.tucson.ars.ag.gov>.



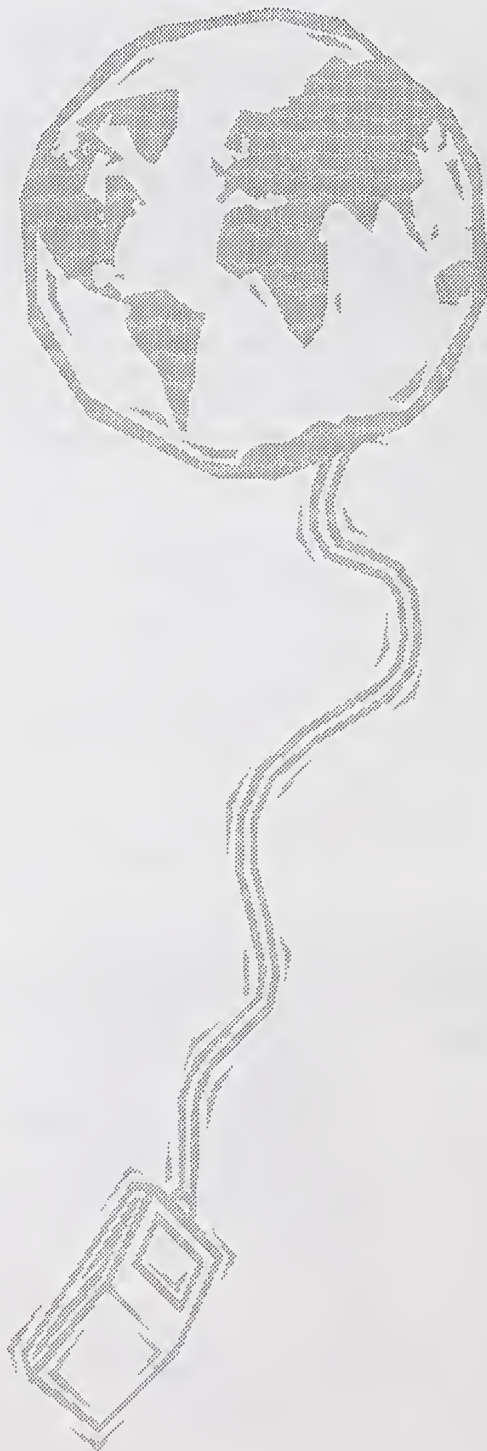


## 5 Ways to Improve Your Home Page



Whether you're creating a home page on the Internet or looking to improve an existing web site, you will be interested in these tips from Debra Spielmaker, state contact for Utah Ag in the Classroom:

1. Make sure the information is useful to teachers. Before you go to the trouble of putting information on the web, ask if it's something teachers can use. Ask the same question when you're creating links between your home page and other web sites that deal with agriculture. "My home page is specifically designed to make it easy for teachers to incorporate information about agriculture into their day-to-day teaching," Spielmaker says.
2. The same advice that applies to your desk top applies to your home page – keep clutter to a minimum. "When people see your home page, they should have a very clear idea of what your organization does," Spielmaker advises. "They can't do that if they have to wade through too much information." For example, ask yourself whether everyone who visits your home page needs to see the names of your board members. Perhaps you could create a link titled "About Our State's Ag in the Classroom Program" for anyone who was interested.
3. Make it easy for people to contact you. In addition to your e-mail address, make sure you include a telephone and mailing address.
4. If you are going to use your web site to sell materials, make sure you provide all the information people need to order. "This is one lesson I learned from experience," Spielmaker says. Do you accept purchase orders? Credit cards? Is there a shipping and handling charge? Teachers, who do not have much time, need all this information before they order.
5. Provide links to other Ag in the Classroom sites. "Chances are, someone who is interested in what Utah's AITC program is doing would also be interested in finding out more about other states," Spielmaker says. "I hope that in the near future, all state Ag in the Classroom programs will have web sites – and we'll all be linked to each other."



# Spotlight

## Maine Teachers of the Year Preserve History While Preserving Seeds

From a single seed, science teachers Neil Lash and Jon Thurston have grown a remarkable heirloom seed project that is helping students learn about botany, agriculture, and history. The Medomak Valley High School Seed Savers program is the only such high school program in the country.

"We inherited a 3,000-square-foot greenhouse from a teacher who was retiring and a Waldoboro greenneck rutabaga seed that had been preserved from the 1886 shipwreck of *The Cambridge*," Lash explains. From those small beginnings, the two teachers have created a hands-on biodiversity project that involves upper-level botany students in both scientific and historical research.

The teachers say there are two primary reasons why they launched the seed project. First, they wanted to preserve as many locally grown, open pollinated seeds as possible. "Many of these seeds have been passed down from generation to generation, and provide a wealth of information, memories, and history," notes the catalog produced by the school's seed program.

Biodiversity provides a second important reason to save seeds. "The unique genetic makeup of these seeds is the result of forces and situations that will never again be naturally duplicated," the catalog says. "Whatever the interesting qualities in the plant – taste, aesthetics, disease resistance, or ability to grow in mid-coast Maine – they are lost if the seeds are not passed on."

Through the Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, students have access to thousands of heirloom seeds from across the world. As they grow the seeds, they also learn about the history and culture that produced them. For example, while growing Anasazi beans, students research the Anasazi culture. They finish their study by cooking and eating a big pot of the beans. "We're preserving history and culture as well as genes," Lash says.

Students are also encouraged to bring in their own seeds. While they preserve the seeds, they

also preserve their own family history through oral history projects and other research into their own family background. "They realize that great-grandma's seeds are something of great value," Lash notes. "In a time when we are losing our farm heritage and our family history, this is one way to reconnect students with their past."

One of the lessons students learned is the importance of proper isolation distances so the plants don't hybridize and contaminate the genetic pool. For example, students were interested in growing a particular squash plant – until they learned it needed a half-mile isolation distance. "Obviously, that was out of the question," Lash says.

The students have made their own heritage seeds available to others through their web site (<http://169.244.147.29/ss> or [Neil\\_W\\_Lash@msad40.avcnet.org](mailto:Neil_W_Lash@msad40.avcnet.org)). They have sent seed packets to 34 different states and four countries.

The heritage seed project offers students a real opportunity to do something about protecting the environment, Lash points out. "When students send a dollar to save the rain forest, someone else is doing all the work," he says. "When they send in a dollar for heritage seeds, they take part in a project where they can make a real difference."

Because of their efforts, the two science teachers at Medomak Valley High School in Waldoboro have been named Teachers of the Year by the Main Ag in the Classroom program. Contact Lash and Thurston at Medomak Valley High School, 309 Marktown Road, Woldoboro, ME 04572; 207-832-6321.

*An interdisciplinary high school horticulture project is preserving heritage seeds in Maine.*





## The Story of Grandpa's John Deere Tractors

Which of the many 19<sup>th</sup> century inventions had the greatest impact on American life? Some might argue that it was the invention of farm machinery – the steel plow, the thresher, and the tractor.

*Grandpa's John Deere Tractors*, a children's book published by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers (ASAE) helps young readers learn about the history of these machines

*A children's book helps young readers learn more about the history of John Deere tractors.*



that helped transform our country from a rural to an urban society. "Farming took so much work before these inventions that more than half the people in the United States had to live on farms just to grow enough food to feed the rest," author Roy Harrington explains.

Beginning with John Deere's 1837 invention of the self-scouring plow, the book takes young readers through the years, explaining each major development about tractors. From the Waterloo Boy, the original kerosene tractor, to today's tractors that include computerized links with satellites for precision farming, young readers learn about the modifications and improvements that have led to the development of today's high-tech vehicles. "Tractors have family trees just as people do," the book reminds readers.

*Grandpa's John Deere Tractors* includes more than 60 photographs and includes both black-and-white historical photos of tractors in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century with color pictures of restored tractors. It is an excellent resource for elementary school students (ages 8 and up) who are fascinated by farm machinery – though the adults who read the book are likely to learn a thing or two.

Author Roy Harrington spent more than 30 years as an engineer for John Deere farm equipment. He has written a best-selling history of John Deere equipment for adults and is also the author of *A Tractor Goes Farming*.

*Grandpa's John Deere Tractors* book is part of ASAE's Looking Back series designed to preserve the agricultural past through books and videos. Single copies are \$9.95 and can be ordered from ASAE, 1-800-695-2723.

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common objectives. Its bylaws stipulate that it will remain "non-commercial, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan."

The Consortium is already working in close cooperation with USDA to provide input into the 1998 National Conference, which will be held May 13-16, 1998, in Williamsburg, Virginia. "We anticipate that the Consortium will be helpful in expanding and enhancing support for Agriculture in the Classroom programs," Linder says.

*Today's technology makes it easier for Utah's AITC program to reach out to teachers throughout the state.*

One goal of the organization is to generate additional financial support for programs promoting agricultural literacy. The Consortium plans to approach corporations, foundations, and private individuals. But, as Linder noted, "the public sector has a role to play as well. We have a great story to tell. The goal of the Consortium will be to make sure we tell it."



## Video Helps Young Children Understand Weeds, Weed Control

"Weeds? Who cares about weeds?" Teachers looking for a way to answer that question may want to use a new ten-minute video designed to bring the impact of invasive weeds to the classroom.

*A Kid's Journey to Understanding Weeds* helps five city kids learn more about weeds and the problems they can cause. The video tracks five third graders' journey from the city playgrounds to the open country of the west, where they meet two children who have spent their lives on a ranch.

By their own admission, the children from the city don't know much about the subject. "The only time I ever hear about weeds is when my grandparents say, 'Jason, you're growing like a weed,'" one confesses.

It isn't long before the city children are learning all about knapweed, the musk thistle, and other invasive weeds that can threaten the environment. They learn firsthand how weeds are spread onto natural resource areas. After a walk through a field, they see how weed seeds cling to their boots and the fur of their dog Hershey. The children quickly

learn that weeds may look like flowers, "but they act like invaders from outer space."

*A Kid's Journey to Understanding Weeds* emphasizes the importance of responsible stewardship and preservation of natural resources. Children learn ways to control weeds while keeping the environment in balance. The video also helps young children focus on the overall theme of biodiversity and the need to protect and preserve North America's great natural resource — land.

Teaching materials that accompany the video are designed specifically for third-grade classroom use. An accompanying poster/activity project enables teachers and students to focus specifically on the invasive weeds found in their local community.

The video and accompanying educational materials were developed by educational and child development consultants. Single copies are available for \$15 from Roy Reichenbach, P.O. Box 728, Douglas, WY 82633.



*They look like flowers – but they act like invaders from outer space. A new video helps children learn all about weeds.*

*Continued from page 1*

Whether it's ordering materials online or taking a "virtual" tour of the state university's research lab, the AITC home page makes it easy for teachers to bring agricultural resources into their classroom.

The home page includes basic information about Utah's Ag in the Classroom program. Current and past issues of the newsletter are available. Teachers who want to know about upcoming workshops can find out by accessing the home page.

The web page also includes information about resources teachers can use in their classrooms. Many of these are available on loan from the AITC office. The site also includes links to other agricultural web sites that offer information specifically designed to help teachers.

Since teachers' time is so limited, and since so few classrooms have telephones, the AITC home page e-mail has become a wonderful way for Spielmaker to avoid playing "telephone tag." She e-mails a message to a teacher, who responds during a free moment. "Using technology means I can sometimes send messages two or three times

a day," Spielmaker says. "That makes it much easier to respond to a teacher's specific needs."

The Utah AITC program emphasizes preservice education for teachers. "We may never reach all the teachers currently in classrooms," Spielmaker says, "but we can make sure that all new teachers know who we are and how to contact us." Every elementary teacher education graduate in the state of Utah (more than 700 each year) is introduced to AITC as part of their methods class. "Of course, all teacher education programs also require their graduates to learn how to use technology in their classroom, so our web page fits right in," Spielmaker points out.

The program also offers inservice workshops designed to incorporate agricultural activities into the state's new core curriculum. "Teachers are scrambling to find activities that meet the requirements of this new curriculum," Spielmaker says. "We have matched our inservice workshops to the curriculum."

## Ag in the Classroom---State Contacts

The individuals listed here are key reference persons in each state. If you have any questions, want to make reports, or need more information about your state's Ag in the Classroom program, contact the following:

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